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KT photo | **Tim Bath**
Rob Burgess, Tribune night editor

House of Burgess: Well-behaved rarely make history

Bree Newsome removes rebel flag from S.C. statehouse

By Rob Burgess
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In the aftermath of 21-year-old racist terrorist Dylann Storm Roof's deadly June 17 attack on the Emanuel African Methodist Church in Charleston, South Carolina, so many politicians suddenly have so much to say about one of his favorite symbols: the battle flag of the Confederate States of America, which flies on the grounds of the state Capitol building in Columbia.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-South Carolina, called it a “roadblock” that belongs in a museum on NBC’s “Meet the Press” Sunday. During his eulogy for fallen Rev. and state Sen. Clementa C. Pinckney, President Barack Obama said the flag was a “reminder of systemic oppression.” June 23, Hillary Clinton told churchgoers near Ferguson, Missouri, it “shouldn’t fly anywhere.” Sen. Tim Scott, R-South Carolina, said in a June 22 statement it “represents pain and oppression.” Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vermont, referred to it from the U.S. Senate floor June 22 as a “relic of our nation’s stained racial history.” During a June 22 news conference, GOP South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley called it “a symbol that divides us.” Democratic Charleston Mayor Joseph P. Riley told CNN’s Jake Tapper June 21 the flag was “an affirmation” for racists. 2012 Republican presidential candidate and former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney took to Twitter June 20 to say South Carolina should “remove it now.”

Thus far, though, all this has amounted to so much hot air. With a supermajority required for removal and the wheels of government turning relatively slowly, there the treasonous banner remains.

“The S.C. Legislature has amassed the support necessary to remove the Confederate flag from the Statehouse grounds ... according to a survey of lawmakers led by The Post and Courier,” read reporter

Glenn Smith's Monday story. "House members have introduced two bills that call for the battle flag's removal. But the bills are expected to be channeled through committees, potentially delaying a final vote for several weeks. Senators, however, allowed for a bill in that chamber to skip the committee process last week. That could mean that senators might take the first vote as early as July 6, sending it to House members and potentially settling the issue before their bills make it through committee."

Enter my newest hero, Bree Ann Byuarium Newsome. Just after sunrise Saturday, the 30-year-old donned a helmet and climbing gear before scaling the 30-foot pole in front of the Capitol.

"I know, sir, I'm prepared," she told officers below.

"Ma'am, come down off the pole!" they bellowed up at her.

"You come against me with hatred and oppression and violence," she screamed, flag in hand. "I come against you in the name of God. This flag comes down today!"

As she lowered herself to the ground, she could be heard reciting Psalm 27.

“I’m trying to come down, sir,” she told the officers. “I’m going to comply. I promise you. I’m going to comply. I’m coming down. I’m prepared to be arrested. It’s OK.”

As she was led away, she repeated the 23rd Psalm.

“Sherri Iacobelli, a spokeswoman for the state Department of Public Safety, said that Newsome, and a companion, James Ian Tyson, 30, both from Charlotte, North Carolina, were charged with defacing monuments on state Capitol grounds,” reported Tony Santaella of WLTX and Doug Stanglin of USA Today Saturday. “The misdemeanor charge carries a fine of up to \$5,000 and a prison term of up to three years or both. A judge gave them each a \$3,000 bond and told them they were allowed to leave the state if they wished. Democratic state Rep. Todd Rutherford of Columbia, who also is an attorney, will represent Newsome. Rutherford is minority leader of the state House of Representatives.”

Minutes after their arrest, a new rebel flag was raised, just in time for a pro-flag rally at the Capitol later that same day.

First, South Carolina should remove the rebel flag from government property immediately. Second, all charges against Newsome and

Tyson should be dropped. Third, the state should pin medals to their chests for doing what most leaders agree is the right thing.

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